

Claims

What is claimed is:

1. A method comprising:

determining at a head-end and data center whether to inform one or more users of

an interactive television service of available content, the one or more users

connected with head-end and data center via a network;

responsive to determining to inform the one or more users of the available

content, generating a hot key signal indicating availability and a location

of the alternate content; and

inserting the hot key signal into a content signal transmitted to the one or more

users from the head-end and data center via the network.
2. The method of claim 1, wherein determining at a head-end and data center

whether to inform one or more users of an interactive television service of

available content is based on results of a search of programming information.
3. The method of claim 2, wherein determining at a head-end and data center

whether to inform one or more users of an interactive television service of

available content further comprising performing a search of one or more Internet

web sites.
4. The method of claim 3, wherein performing a search of one or more web sites

comprises using the results of the search of programming information.

5. The method of claim 1, wherein determining at a head-end and data center whether to inform one or more users of an interactive television service of available content is based on information received during generation of programming information.
6. The method of claim 1, wherein the hot key signal comprises an Internet Protocol (IP) data packet, the IP data packet having a header portion and a body portion, the body portion having a data field indicating a location of the alternate content.
7. The method of claim 6, wherein the IP data packet is transmitted from the head-end and data center as an IP multicast to the one or more users via the network.
8. A head-end and data center system comprising:
 - a hot key generation portion to determine whether to inform one or more users of an interactive television service of available content, the one or more users connected with the head-end and data center via a network and responsive to determining to inform the one or more users of the available content, generating a hot key signal indicating availability and a location of the alternate content;
 - a multiplexor system to insert the hot key signal into a content signal; and
 - a transport system to transmit to the one or more users from the head-end and data center via the network.

9. The system of claim 8, wherein the hot key generation portion determines whether to inform one or more users of an interactive television service of available content based on results of a search of programming information.
10. The system of claim 9, wherein the hot key generation portion determines whether to inform one or more users of an interactive television service of available content by performing a search of one or more Internet web sites.
11. The system of claim 10, wherein performing a search of one or more web sites comprises using the results of the search of programming information.
12. The system of claim 8, wherein the hot key generation portion determines whether to inform one or more users of an interactive television service of available content based on information received during generation of programming information.
13. The system of claim 8, wherein the hot key signal comprises an Internet Protocol (IP) data packet, the IP data packet having a header portion and a body portion, the body portion having a data field indicating a location of the alternate content.
14. The system of claim 13, wherein the IP data packet is transmitted from the head-end and data center as an IP multicast to the one or more users via the network.

15. A machine-readable medium having stored thereon a series of instructions, the instructions, when executed by a processor, cause the processor to:
determine at a head-end and data center whether to inform one or more users of
an interactive television service of available content, the one or more users
connected with head-end and data center via a network;
responsive to determining to inform the one or more users of the available
content, generate a hot key signal indicating availability and a location of
the alternate content; and
insert the hot key signal into a content signal transmitted to the one or more users
from the head-end and data center via the network.
16. The machine-readable medium of claim 15, wherein determining at a head-end
and data center whether to inform one or more users of an interactive television
service of available content is based on results of a search of programming
information.
17. The machine-readable medium of claim 16, wherein determining at a head-end
and data center whether to inform one or more users of an interactive television
service of available content further comprising performing a search of one or
more Internet web sites.

18. The machine-readable medium of claim 17, wherein performing a search of one or more web sites comprises using the results of the search of programming information.
19. The machine-readable medium of claim 15, wherein determining at a head-end and data center whether to inform one or more users of an interactive television service of available content is based on information received during generation of programming information.
20. The machine-readable medium of claim 15, wherein the hot key signal comprises an Internet Protocol (IP) data packet, the IP data packet having a header portion and a body portion, the body portion having a data field indicating a location of the alternate content.
21. The machine-readable medium of claim 20, wherein the IP data packet is transmitted from the head-end and data center as an IP multicast to the one or more users via the network.